The Rapaports Milan/Bluewater New Mexico

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Irving Rapaport	My name is Irv Rapaport and I was born in the upper Westside of Manhattan.
David Dunaway	And where did you grow up, Bert?
IR	Well, I left home when I was 15. Oh, slight exaggeration. About 10 days before I turned 16. I went to work on farms in New England and up in Quewquepek in the Maritimes. And then worked for a literary agent when I was 16. I went to college at the University of Minnesota, school of mines for a year when I was 17. Enlisted in the paratroops during WWII. Did my service in France and Belgium. Came back and worked in the mines in Leadville, Colorado, and went back and completed my degree in geological engineering at Minnesota. Went to work right after the Manhattan Project terminated in 1948. I joined the Atomic Energy Commission in 1949 and pursued uranium explorations for about two and a half years in the United States and South America. Started my own company in 1952.
DD	This would be in New Mexico?
IR	There were mines in New Mexico, in Colorado, Arizona, and Mexico. Not only uranium, but copper and silver. And pretty well retired about ten years ago.
DD	But were you involved in running the trading post?
IR	No. I met Louise at the trading post and I was in charge of the Atomic Energy Commission's office in Grants, which the Grants uranium district probably produced half of the United States' uranium. It was the largest district in the world.
DD	Good. Thank you.
Louise Rapaport	Mine is not nearly as complex. I was born in Connecticut; my parents took me to California when I was one; I grew up in Pasadena, California, and went to school through schools there. Went to Woodbury Business College also. At 25 I found myself in New Mexico at the trading post.
DD	Now that obviously is a story. How'd that happen?
LR	Well, I don't know if we need to go into that part. It was not the happiest time in my life.

DD Well, when you say at age 25, were your parents taking over the trading post?

LR No, not yet. I had the trading post.

DD Before your parents?

LR OK, so I was married and then – the kids don't know, they don't have to – like I said, it wasn't the happiest time in my life, so let's just start when I was 25.

DD And you were then the sudden owner of this trading post?

LR Yeah.

DD And had you lived in that area before?

LR Never.

DD Never. Where had you been living previously?

LR I had come from the Northwest. Not too long before that. And all the Indians kept saying, "Wait till you see the blue water lake. It is so beautiful. Wait till you see!" And then finally when the spring floods dried out enough to get there, it was nothing but a mud puddle. No big tall pine trees, just little pinons.

DD Well, I'm still a little unclear on how you entered – I don't want you to say anything you're uncomfortable with, but what brought you to New Mexico? Just suddenly to go to the trading post?

LR Well, I followed someone.

DD You followed someone to New Mexico? OK, and then you ended up with the ownership of the trading post. Who had it before you?

LR I don't even know. Maybe one of the Bowlins.

DD I know they had a famous trading post. Did they own this one as well?

LR They might have.

DD OK. So you got it from a friend?

LR Yeah.

DD OK. And how many employees did it have when you took it?

LR We had a couple. One, Bob Mortenson. He was jack-of-all-trades and pretty much ran the place. And then we did have a café which was not very nice. And we had a cook and her husband ran that.

DD So one person in the post and a couple people in the café?

LR Yeah. It was not a really clean café, so we did not keep it very long.

DD OK. And they were all on the same side of the trading post?

LR Yes.

DD OK. And what kind of condition was it in when you started?

LR To me, it was pretty primitive. Yeah, it was, I would say, pretty primitive. But it was a trading post. They weren't supposed to be fancy and nice.

DD So made out of wood?

LR Oh, yeah.

DD A long building with big windows, if I remember?

LR That's right, yeah. I have pictures if you want to see them. It was from the grocery end to the curios to the gas station in the middle, to the curios and then the café.

DD And let's see. Maybe you could give me a sense of a typical day from morning to night.

LR We got up early, and saw some beautiful, beautiful sunrises. The Indians, they got up early, so they would start coming in.

DD When did you open up?

LR 5 or 6 o'clock. In the summer, it was earlier. The winter, it was later. And a typical day? Mostly it ended in the trading post—I mean, the grocery store part. And we waited on those customers and then, after the café opened, then we would get customers in the curio store and it was quite profitable because that was not too long after the war, and

people had money and they had tires and they spent it and they were traveling. Children would go back and forth. The bell would ring that somebody ran over this rope at the gas station, and I would be filling cars with gasoline and waiting on, meet customers.

DD You yourself would fill the gas? You didn't have any…?

LR Yeah. Yeah. This bum once, but after a while, we had to let him go because he was treating the trading post as his own, along with the money. At least it got us through, over the hump. Okay, so I was there by myself, and I didn't know that Indians were friendly, coming from California. It was okay in the daytime, but at night I had a problem. So finally I had my mother come out and stay with me. Finally in the end, both my parents came. We all bought the trading post together. So the three of us ran it.

DD How did you persuade your parents to move to the distant corner of New Mexico?

LR It wasn't really hard after my mother came out, and the Indians liked her. They really liked her a lot. She had pure white hair. They used to call her "The White-Haired Lady." They used to play jokes on her too. One time, when they—remember that volcano?

IR That was a cinder cone.

LR They piled a whole bunch of tires inside of it. Set it on fire. And that got her all excited, thought we were going to have another volcanic eruption.

IR That was Navajo Indians.

LR Yeah.

DD Right. Must have smelled something awful.

LR We were far enough away.

IR They might as well have taken some dynamite, and set it off with a great explosion. It's the only practical joke I can remember the Indians—I ran an Indian—well, I had to use Indians because the Bureau of Indian Affairs insist that Indian lease employ Indians whenever possible.

DD Good idea.

IR Except they didn't speak English.

LR The first day I was there, I was left practically on my own, and I was showing some tourists some rugs. So I sold them this beautiful square rug. It was quite pretty, but I didn't know anything about rugs. And so I said, "This one's cheap. It's only $19.95." Well, when they made the dollar sign, the one did look like it was part of the dollar sign. So that was my first sale.

DD So, this typical day, you'd get a breakfast—people would come into the café for breakfast.

LR Yeah, but that didn't last too long. After my father came, we closed it for sure. And then he started rebuilding. He built a really nice café, and we had so many customers, and it was unbelievable. I said, "I'm not going near there!" Well, the first morning it was so crowded with people that, I found myself waiting in there on people, which I didn't like to do.

DD And what did you serve—the typical road fare? Chicken fried steak, eggs?

LR Chicken fried steak! I think that's horrible. But people loved chicken fried steak. Breakfast was really great. My father made terrific pancakes.

DD Then after the breakfast rush would die down, you'd be attending the curio shop? Would you get a lot of customers at lunch?

LR Yeah, yeah, we did.

DD And then how about dinner?

LR Did we do dinner?

IR I ate dinner there.

LR OK. We did dinner too.

DD What was the biggest meal of the day for you?

LR It'd be breakfast because we would get up early, and we had this great sign. And we got a lot of breakfast trade.

DD Who were people who were stopping there? I'd imagine you'd have different clientele.

LR Local people and also tourists.

DD Now the tourists, when you say tourists, do you mean travelers?

LR Yes, travelers.

DD I mean, at some point, I think along Route 66 there's a shift. And people are coming to Route 66 just to be on Route 66.

LR No, these are people traveling across country.

DD OK, that's what I thought. And so they were various classes?

LR Uh-huh. We had a Texaco station, and that was good gas, for something like 25 cents a gallon.

DD Is that part of complex that you're talking about?

LR Yes, yes.

DD Now you had a café, gas station, curio shop--

LR And groceries.

IR You did quite a bit of trade with the Indians, actually.

LR Pardon?

IR You did quite a trade with the Indians.

LR Yeah, we did. We did a lot of trade with the Indians. And Bluewater Village was, what, two miles away?

IR Louise is pretty good at cutting up mutton.

LR When my father came, he'd cut mutton in nice little chops and steaks and put it out in the case and they wouldn't touch it. They just wanted big chunks of meat.

DD What else were the particular tastes of the people in the grocery, your Indian clientele? What were they there for?

LR Flour. You mean kind of foods?

DD Yeah.

LR Lots of flour and lard.

IR And kla-che-gie [red soda pop].

LR Yeah. We had pop.

DD Red pop?

LR Yeah.

DD Soda pop, you mean?

LR Yes.

DD How about gingerbread snaps? Ginger snaps.

LR Uh-uh.

DD No? Did they have a taste for the sweet?

LR Oh, yes. Very, very much so. Yeah. They feed these babies Coca-Cola.

DD Way back then, when you first started?

LR Yes.

DD So you were selling a lot of sugar?

LR Yeah.

DD And did you sell candy and cookies?

LR Oh, yes. Candy. They liked candy. And pop, they were crazy about soda pop. And so their mainstay was flour and lard.

DD Now, you were off the reservation, right?

LR Yes.

DD Did you sell liquor as well?

LR Not then. Later we did. We did. Jake Atkinson gave me his liquor license.

DD So when did you close the place down? I guess the café now in the second round is separated from the…?

LR No, it's all one building. All one building.

DD OK. What time did you close down?

LR At night? Well, in the summer sometimes it'd be ten o'clock. We had long days. And if a drunken Indian came along, it was earlier.

DD Earlier in the day?

LR Yeah.

DD How were your relations with the—it was mainly Navajo and Hopi?

LR Navajo and Zuni. Mostly Navajo. Some Lagunas.

DD Laguna. It's a little ways from Laguna, isn't it? Twenty miles along from Laguna?

LR I know, but they worked on the railroad.

DD Yes, right. I've interviewed people who've done that. Slept in the boxcar?

LR I don't know where they slept.

DD And did you notice a difference between your Navajo clients and the Laguna?

LR Oh, very definitely. Yes.

DD How were they different?

LR Oh, Lagunas are much more refined. And they will kill a rattlesnake, whereas a Navajo will not.

DD Yes, right. And how about the Zuni?

LR The Zunis. They came less than the others, but they came now and

then. And they came on par with the Lagunas.

DD And were you buying rugs? What kind of trade did you have with the Indians? What would you buy?

LR Jewelry. And they'd bring a rug in now and then.

DD And was it the scene where everybody comes with one little piece of jewelry or rug and they show up and…?

LR No, not usually, just a couple of people.

DD Just a couple of people. So not a lot of people selling. The same people regularly?

LR Let's see. Not really. Reaching back. We had all kinds of different people coming in and selling jewelry. Pawning jewelry.

DD And did they redeem?

LR Yes, sometimes. Yes. I never did get a piece of pawn, because I always felt like they were going to come back and take it, want it.

DD Uh-huh. And was that usually the case?

LR Yes.

DD And what kind of stuff were they pawning?

LR Necklaces and turquoise. And belts. Silver belts.

DD Conchos?

LR Silver belts. Conchos, yes.

DD And what would you give, say, to pawn a concho belt?

LR I can't tell you that anymore.

DD Oh, OK. I'm just curious what the prices or values were. And occasionally rugs? And were they from a particular area in the Navajo community?

LR Usually around Crownpoint.

DD Crownpoint. I know there's some geographic differences in the way they weave. What were these, natural fiber rugs?

LR Mostly. I think there was some dyed too. In fact, when we went there, they had a weaver and a silversmith. And then there was this man that came from Albuquerque once a week, go to the reservation and get a whole pickup load full of pelts. And I guess that's where the money really was, was in wool. And he'd come through. And he'd come by with jewelry now and then too because he'd be out there on the reservation.

DD And he'd be selling or buying? Selling?

LR He'd sell the jewelry.

DD He'd buy there and sell it at the trading post?

LR Yeah.

DD Do you have a feeling that things had a different price at the trading post than on the reservation?

LR I would think so, yeah.

DD Did many of the tourists go up into the reservation?

LR Oh, no. Not then. Later they'd go to Crownpoint for rugs. But not then.

DD Your mother and your father. What were their names?

LR May and Otto Brock?

DD B-R-O-C-K?

LR Right.

DD And did they like running the trading post?

LR Yeah, they did.

DD What did they like most?

LR I don't know. My mother liked dealing with the Indians. They liked her and she liked them. They got along really well.

DD And your father, what did he like most?

LR Well, he mostly spent his time fixing up the café. Painting signs.

DD Now, I understand that there were murals in that trading post. Could you describe those murals for someone that can't see them? The topics or…?

LR On the front of the trading post there was an Indian symbol. I have a picture of it. To somebody that can't see it, it's something like a knife-wing. I see what you mean about the kitchen. There's a piece of jewelry called the knife-wing, with wings out and a little tiny hat and ducks were painted on the front of the building.

DD But weren't there murals painted inside on the walls?

LR No.

DD I wonder what someone talked about when they talk about the murals at Bluewater.

LR Well, usually we hung rugs on the wall. Not usually, we always did.

DD Did you visit much with the other trading posts? Say out in Prewitt?

LR A little bit.

DD How was their post different from yours?

LR Bowlin's Trading Post, they had exquisite jewelry. Yeah, and they spoke Navajo. They'd been there forever. So they could go to Zuni and buy jewelry because it took, even then, a lot of money, like maybe $5,000, to get a permit to buy from them.

DD Who'd you pay the money to?

LR To the Zunis. And you'd get the permit and they could go around to the different houses where they made jewelry.

DD $5,000 for a permit to buy jewelry?

LR I don't know if it was quite that much then. But it wasn't that much later that it was $5,000.

DD And so there were traders who literally went from house to house, asking what they have? Rugs, whatever?

LR Yeah.

DD Now, I'd like to get a sense for how the goods that you were buying changed over time. How the styles of the Navajo, say, in their rugs or in their jewelry changed.

LR We weren't there long enough to see a change.

DD Your parents bought it in the '50s?

LR No, '47. I went there in October '47. And they left about '57. That's about ten years. So there wasn't any change as far as jewelry was concerned.

DD Some people have suggested that the rise in the number of tourists had an effect on the kinds of weaving that the Navajos were doing. That is to say, that if tourists liked it this way, they'd go make it that way. You didn't notice? How about jewelry? Was it the same when you got there as when you left?

LR Just about, yes. I didn't see any difference.

DD Maybe changes happened after that.

LR Yeah. Yeah, lots of changes.

DD I'm sure. What did the Prewitt post look like?

LR I don't think I was ever in it.

DD Oh, OK. How come Bowlin's had such good jewelry?

LR Because they'd been there forever. Forever. I mean, they spoke Navajo, they had these great signs on the highway that'd make people stop.

DD How about cockfights? I understand that in Milan and Bluewater and that area that cockfights were a phenomenon?

LR What?

DD Cockfights.

LR Oh, cockfights! Oh, I don't think I'd been there two weeks, and someone said, "Come on, we're gonna see a cockfight." I didn't know what a cockfight was. I walk in there, and these poor chickens! They're beating up on each other! Oh, that was horrible. Not the last cockfight I ever went to, but yes, they definitely had cockfights.

DD Who would participate in those? Everybody?

LR I think the local people.

DD Everybody?

LR Yeah.

DD And do you remember, how did that happen in those days. Would they do it in the evening or the day?

LR It was in the daytime.

DD In the daytime. And where would they hold them?

LR It was behind another trading post.

DD Which one would that be?

LR Jake Atkinson's Rattlesnake Trading Post.

DD And where was that?

LR Bowlin's was on our side of the street**,** couple of miles. And it was in between, on the other side.

DD And why there? Because Jake was a big fan or something like that?

LR He sold alcohol. The Indians thought that was great sport. So did local people.

DD So were the Indians and the local people pretty mixed then? At a cockfight, say?

LR Yes, as far as the cockfights.

DD 50-50?

LR I would say more local people than anything.

DD And did any of the Indians leave the reservation and move into Bluewater? Down into the Valley?

LR No. Well, like the Martinezes—Patty Martinez, who brought in uranium rocks to start with. I think he bought some land up by Prewitt. I don't think it was on the reservation, was it?

DD Well, he couldn't have bought it if it was on the reservation.

LR No, I don't think it was.

IR Could have been on one side or the other.

DD Well, this is really interesting. Do you remember any stories of your customers, the stranger ones, or the funnier ones?

KR I have stories, but I'm not sure I should tell them.

DD Oh, please. Tell them all.

KR Well, there was this man I was talking about earlier. Smitty, they called him. Went out to buy pelts. He used to come in and sit on a platform where we used to keep the flour. And buy sardines. And the sardine juice would roll down the front of him. And this—I hadn't been there very long, and I was alone—he came in and he wanted to see my rugs, so I showed him— because he wanted to know…I don't know what he said. He got me down on the rugs. And on that point, the bell rang for gas – ah! – so I went out and this young man was there, and I said, "Would you please not leave until this other man leaves?" It turned out that he was from the trading post above us and his name was Bob Bowlin and I figured he saved my life.

DD Yeah, that must be hard being there pretty much by yourself.

KR Well, that was not a good idea. I tried not to do that.

IR I never thought sardines as being an aphrodisiac.

DD How about stranger customers that you had? You had…?

LR The Gypsies?

DD You mean literally Gypsies?

LR Yes.

DD Tell me about that.

LR I didn't know what they were, but this Bob Mortenson was still there. He said, "For God's sake, lock the doors!" I tried to lock the doors. Couldn't lock the doors fast enough. And stood over the jewelry; somebody was standing in the café where they went in to get coffee. In front of everybody, they emptied every sugar bowl in the café. And you couldn't see them. They were very clever.

DD Uh-huh. They liked sugar too.

LR Yeah. Well, but the thing was, they're thieves.

IR Tell him about the time you lost your temper with that Indian, Louise.

LR You really want to hear that story?

DD & LR Um-hmm.

LR OK. As I said, sometimes we had to close the store early because of a drunken Indian. So Jimmy Yazzie got very drunk. And we finally ended up hiding his wife, letting her out the back door. Locking up the store. And he was out there, hollering and ranting and raving. And he laid down in the middle of the highway. And you could hear the trucks coming. And I stood and I backed up to the door with my hands over my ears. No Indian's going to get run over. Just before that truck came, he jumped up and ran and kicked in a huge plate glass window, right beside me. I was so angry! I ran—we had the house there too, a house in the back part—and I ran through the house, grabbed the gun, ran out the back door, and he's running through the field, and I'm shooting at him. Thank God I missed him. But I tried, I was so angry, I was so angry, he scared me so badly.

DD Yes, I can imagine. A plate glass window. Did you often—did you have thieves, actual robberies?

LR No.

DD No. Never that you can remember?

LR No. Probably things were picked up and…

DD I don't mean this business, but actually someone coming in with a gun and…

LR No. Thank goodness.

DD Yes, that's right. And you were fairly isolated?

LR Definitely.

DD I don't know if you've ever seen that movie *Petrified Forest*? Did you ever see that one? A Humphrey Bogart film? It takes place right around the years that you're talking about, 1947. Takes place somewhere along the New Mexico-Arizona line. About someone who stops in the café. You might want to take a look at it. It's one of those old Route 66 films. And what were the other entertainments? How big a town was Bluewater?

LR Bluewater was just a little Mormon village. So there wasn't any entertainment there at all. There was nothing there. There was a little school.

DD So where did people go? They went off into…

LR Into Grants.

DD Into Grants?

LR Yes. The first summer we were there, the carrot fields were in full bloom and those were the sweetest carrots you'd ever eat. And the Indians came and worked in the carrot fields. Could I have some water, please? We had lots of Indians in the store then. And if it rained, that was really hard, if they came in the store. It really smelled badly. The buyers would come in and buy truckloads of carrots and then sell them and that was very profitable.

DD And they'd do the trading at your store?

LR Yeah, a lot did, yeah.

DD Now were these the same families and the same people year after year? Or were they itinerant? Migrant workers?

LR They were migrant workers. They would bring them in. They'd go to the reservation and get them and bring them. And there were Indians that had never seen a train and their eyes were so big and wide at all these strange things. That's how far out on the reservation they went.

DD And where'd they get the water for those carrots?

LR They had a lot of water. That's where the uranium—later, when it came in—bought the water rights.

DD And that killed the carrot fields?

LR That killed the carrot fields.

DD I guess uranium was just more profitable than…

LR For sure. [laughs]

IR That was probably the best carrot I've ever eaten. Nice tops. In this valley, growing competition and they cut the tops off and put them in a yellow cellophane bag... about a buck a bunch less than what they could sell Bluewater carrots for. And I thought that was what killed the industry. Just couldn't compete.

DD Who was running those farms?

IR Card ran one of them. Ralph Card?

LR Yeah, Ralph Card and Church. John Church.

DD And those fields, were they along 66?

LR Yeah, right on the highway.

DD Right on the highway. And were these individual farms or were they kind of company operations?

IR Freese was an individual, wasn't he? Fred Freese?

DD F-R-E-E-S-E?

LR I don't think there were a lot. Maybe like four people that had them in the whole valley.

IR Well, Church was the biggest business.

LR I think so.

DD And your water came from Bluewater Lake?

LR Deep wells.

IR Underground water.

DD OK, underground water.

IR Yeah, these geologists, I think, even at the university didn't believe there was that much water here. They were ashamed as geologists because some wild-catter put in a deep well and artesian water came up in great quantity. It was quite an aquifer and a tremendous amount of pure water was stored in that aquifer.

DD Where was this artesian well?

IR The first one was in Bluewater Valley on the north side of the highway. And after that a number of wells were dug, but it was a goodly supply of artesian water.

DD So Navajos—so you have a fair amount of sheep-herding in the area?

LR No.

IR Used to be. In fact, Freddie Martinez, the discoverer of uranium, has the story, apocryphal, that they wanted to poison Ketenwa, which is where I had one of my mines, one of the first on Santa Fe property. And 900 sheep died that night. And he thought the uranium had poisoned them. We looked into it. The uranium didn't poison them, but there was a geo-botanist, out of Washington—I forget her name now—came out and determined that associated with the uranium was selenium. And selenium is necessary for the production of astragalus, which is loco weed, and the sheep had eaten the loco weed and it killed them. So it wasn't the uranium as much as the association of uranium with selenium, which gave rise, indirect.

DD So the selenium caused more loco weed to grow, is that what you're saying?

IR It's necessary for astragalus to grow. It needs selenium in order to

germinate.

DD So what happened? Did he file a suit? I mean, that's a lot of sheep to lose in the night.

LR Against whom? Who would he..?

DD The miners?

LR The mining hadn't started yet.

IR There was no mine at that time. That's why they call it Poison Canyon. It had a beautiful outcrop of uranium-bearing material—carnotite, tyuyamunite, beautiful, one of the best outcrops I'd ever seen. But there was no mining at that time.

DD Well, maybe we should talk about uranium mining along Route 66. By the time you get there, in the early 50's…?

IR '51.

DD In '51. Are there already miners?

IR No.

DD Aren't there silver mines in that area too, though? Turquoise and silver mines?

IR Not there. Turquoise is associated with copper. And there was some copper in the Zunis. But turquoise never was famous for that. There's some molybdenum with the uranium, some vanadium. Some selenium, but uranium was the principal product.

DD So Patty Martinez, somewhere in the early '50s, shows you or others these uranium rocks?

IR The story is that he went in to see Gunderson, the mayor of Grants, with these specimens, and I guess Gunderson finally put a Geiger counter on it and found it was highly radioactive. I guess that's when he called the Atomic Energy Commission, and they sent me in. I would have been in charge of a hard rock district in Marysvale, Utah, and they asked me to come on down and take charge of uranium exploration in New Mexico.

DD And how did that proceed?

IR How did that proceed?

DD Yeah, did you set up office in Grants?

IR Yeah, the Santa Fe Railroad was kind enough to let us have the office in Prewitt. Free of charge. For the U.S. Government, they very seldom get anything free of charge. And they did our assaying free of charge, some of our drafting, and I and four geologists that were sent to me right out of school mapped the entire area, named the formations, determined what stratum one could expect to find uranium in, and then coordinated our activities with a host of mining companies that flooded into the area to pursue the development of uranium.

DD Now, I know there's been a lot of mining along Route 66, before we go any further into uranium mining. For example, I think it was coal-mining in Gallup, for example.

IR They still mine coal in Gallup.

DD That was the site of a very famous strike in 1934. You know, they shut down the coal mining industry.

IR Was that the Wobblies?

DD No, no. This was 1934, so it'd be later. I think it was a union activity, and there were shootings, and it's quite a dramatic thing. But not in your area, not coal, not in Bluewater?

IR Actually, there's a huge coal mine this time on the Lee Ranch. Open pit. I think they're mining over 10,000 tons a day.

DD Now?

IR Now. They put in a siding that led to Prewitt, and in Prewitt there's a power plant. And the coal is trucked into Prewitt, where they generate electricity and ship it into Arizona and California.

DD So as you discover these formations, map them out with your team of other geologists, what is the federal role in this, other than the provision of uranium? Was that it? The federal government just wanted there to be lots of uranium mined?

IR Passed the Atomic Energy Act—I forget what year that was—the Atomic Energy Act—well, I can tell you this story. The major was an Indian, Joy Sinyella. He was a Supai Indian from down below the

Grand Canyon, in the bottom of the Grand Canyon, married to a Laguna. And he came into my office with these specimens, and I went out to look at them, and it was a huge outcrop there on the Laguna reservation, and I called the boss, and the boss said, "Well, we'll try to get some company interested in pursuing that." They called in the Anaconda Copper Company. And I remember, myself and Jack Nable was in charge of Anaconda and a lawyer named Jack East up here from Albuquerque sat there at this kiva for three days straight while they—I think they were falling asleep inside the kiva, debating what they would do. And finally, they decided they would issue a lease. And I left. I got tired, got bored. And as I remember when Anaconda finally got down to getting the contract, they said, "We can't give you the contract. We already gave it to Rapaport." Whereupon they called my boss there in Washington. Of course, they hadn't. But, I don't know, there were hundreds of millions, if not a few billion dollars worth of uranium out of that deposit.

LR Too bad you couldn't take it.

DD So it didn't go to Anaconda?

IR It went to Anaconda.

DD It did go.

IR The Lagunas did very well. All the workers were trained to run heavy machinery, they put up schools. I don't know how many millions of dollars they spent on reclamation to get it back into original shape. And units were all huge royalties were given back to the Lagunas.

DD Back in the '50s?

IR I would say, yep, back in the 1950s. Went into the '60s, was a big mine. Open pit.

DD And it ran through into the '60s. Now is it near Route 66?

IR Yeah, I'd say within 3 miles of 66.

DD North?

IR North. Huge deposit there. That certainly stimulated quite a bit of activity among the Lagunas.

DD OK. So…

SIDE B

IR …sort of a backwater. We had people coming from Germany, from Russia. If you wanted to discuss the Cypriot situation, we had Cypriot Greeks, Cypriot Turks. A number of the people that we were associated with at that time have later become major executives in major corporations in America.

DD So not Indians? Are you speaking of Indians now?

IR No, I'm speaking about the engineers and geologists. For Exxon, Phillips, Carnegie…just about every major mining and oil company had sent their young turks in there to pursue this large development.

DD What were the peak years?

IR There were three periods of boom, and three periods of bust. I would say the middle '50s was the first boom. Then I think it dropped off, the price of uranium went down. It peaked probably again in the '60s and again in the '70s. Most mining, most metals, there's a huge variation. They're very volatile. Even the latest—I think uranium was at about 120, 130 dollars per pound in 308, not long ago. It's down around 40 or 50 dollars now. But with this present energy crisis, there's quite a bit of activity right now. So this would be the fourth boom.

DD Now where did they have health care facilities on 66? In Grants, they had a hospital?

IR Built a hospital.

LR They finally built a hospital.

IR Among others**,** put up a major hospital in Grants.

DD And then there was one in Gallup, I guess. You're closer to Grants, right?

IR & LR Yes.

DD Significantly.

IR The Grants mineral belt extends from Gallup through Grants and almost to Albuquerque.

DD Now what about the yellow cake and the problems that began to emerge for the miners and communities in yellow cake?

IR Well, I'm prejudiced on that point. I personally don't believe that—well, I've worked in the uranium mines now for about 50 years, used to g odown most every day underground, and I'm pretty dog-gone healthy.

DD Well, I'm certainly glad to hear that.

IR I do know that among the Navajos, up there around Shiprock, they had little dog-holes that were not supervised. The radon count was intense, and an awful lot of Navajos ended up with whole cell lung cancer from the uranium. No question about that. As far as our mines or the mines of the big companies, we kept an alpha count on every miner every day and when he was exposed to anything approaching the maximum allowable, he was removed from underground.

DD And what did those people do then? How did they earn their living?

IR Put them on surface work. Put them in the open pit. But the biggest problem was miners that smoked. I remember Dr. Sacomanto, who was the expert in the field, at Grand Junction, I think it was, delivered a lecture showing slides of miners' lungs. As in, the autopsy. And almost every one of them was a heavy smoker.

DD And in those days, what sort of ventilation facilities did you have in mines?

IR You could hardly stand up against the blast of that ventilation. In fact, years and years ago, I wrote a paper for the *Lamp*, which is the Exxon publication, on upside-down drilling, I devised a system. And it was used for – we did an awful lot of work—I had a drilling company as well—and we did an awful lot of work digging large diameter holes for ventilation where needed. Not only for our own mines, but for the major companies.

DD OK. Well, who made the money on those mines?

IR I did.

DD In other words, the mine owners, and the communities benefited indirectly because they got a hospital?

IR Roads. Roads up to Ambrose Lake still being used. Which were muddy ruts before we came there. The schools were built, the swimming pool. And I'd say that a contract miner—in other words, he's paid by his output—could easily make $50,000 a year, which in that time, could translate to twice that these days. These miners were really making big money, if they were contract miners. Now that's not for the days-pay people.

DD Now who worked days-pay and who worked as a contract miner?

IR Days-pay could be anybody. Anybody that was willing to work.

DD But as a rule, were these Indian or non-Indian.

IR It made no difference. It didn't differentiate.

DD But I mean, what were the numbers like? Percentage wise?

IR Oh, I'd say maybe 95% of them were non-Indian because of among the miners lack of experience in the mines. Most of these **ten-day** miners were highly experienced in running every piece of equipment you could think of, drilling and blasting, knowing how to handle explosives.

DD And so were the Indians at all working in the mines? Is that the final percentage?

IR I had Indians working for me on the rigs. And some in the mines. But I didn't differentiate as to ethnic group.

DD Given that you were in Indian country, I'm just curious as to why there were such a large percentage of non-Indian miners.

IR Cultural ethic, more than anything else. They may or may not show up on Monday. In a mining operation – say the hoist man lays off, you can't have a substitute hoist man there. He might be off to Eabichay—the work was not a prime consideration as far as the culture was concerned. I would say they're fiercely independent, they're intelligent, there are some that could compete under any circumstance. But I don't think that the culture lent themselves to showing up and working every day.

DD And were there any taboos related to going down under the earth and mining?

IR No, none that I can think of.

LR They don't want women in the mines.

IR I don't think I ever had a woman working in the mines. But among the big companies, finally they had women running the trains. I'd say that by the time the bigger companies quit, about 25% of the workforce were women. Something like that. I think there were maybe 5,000 miners there. It was a pretty big-sized operation.

DD 5,000 miners. And are they driving on Route 66 to get to and from work?

IR Yep. Most of them using the San Mateo road because the owners thought people were up there were panning—of course, you had the miners drum them out. Also, I think at one time, at the peak, there was something pretty close to 80 drill rigs doing exploration.

DD OK. Let's go back to Grants. And let's pretend you went on a Saturday afternoon and got some supplies and did your shopping. And driving back in the car, truck, what did you drive in those days?

IR Pick-up.

DD Pick-up. Ford?

IR Yeah. Almost nothing but Fords.

DD In your pick-up, and you're going home at the end of the day. Can you sort of describe what you would see, what businesses you'd see between Grants and Bluewater? As you'd go out of Grants?

LR A bar.

DD On 66?

LR What did they name it? Nice bar, they had a big dance floor, restaurant in Milan.

DD What else? Even little stores I'm interested in.

LR I think on Ambrosia Road, right?

IR We lived at the Milan Hotel, remember, Louise? Before I built an office in the apartment building there. But when we married, we

lived at the Milan Hotel.

DD Is that the one still there?

LR Yes.

DD And you lived there?

LR Yeah.

DD And were there other long-range people living there, or were most of the people at the Milan Hotel in those days long-term?

LR There were some long, yeah.

DD OK, so anything between Grants and Milan? Businesses?

LR Not then. Now there's a McDonald's.

DD Oh, no. I'm thinking, I want you to be way back then.

LR No. Didn't Thigpens have some kind of a trading post near the overpass?

IR I don't think so. It was not then.

LR Oh, it was later. OK. There wasn't much. But they did have some little stores on Ambrosia Road. But that's not Highway 66.

IR I think the '50s, I was induced to use—I was running an Indian mine at the time, I think I had about eight Indians—I ran an HD-5 Allis Chalmers Motor to build a Catholic community center there in Grants. We used Indian masons—this was all free of charge—to do the rock work at that community center. And that was one of the first buildings to modernize Grants. I think it was 1952.

DD So, were there any other cafes on the way home? Would you ever stop between Grants and Bluewater? There might be gas stations?

IR A couple bars.

DD A couple bars?

IR There was a small bar, the Leybas Bar, and the Miner's Bar. That was in Grants.

DD OK. Well, suppose you went the other way. From Bluewater towards Gallup. What would you find out on Route 66? What do you remember? What businesses?

LR Bowlin's Trading Post. The Atkinson Rattlesnake Trading Post. Then we're getting up to Prewitt, and after that is the Continental Divide.

DD What was in Prewitt?

IR A trading post, I think.

LR I was never in it. I can't remember.

IR The railroad stopped there. That was 1951, I guess. The Santa Fe Railroad owned every odd-numbered section from ten miles on each side of the right of way. And Santa Fe was debating whether they wanted themselves to set up a mining company or turn it over to some of these large mining companies. And we met there at Prewitt, and [Fred G.] Claire Gurley, who was at that time president of the Santa Fe, pulled in on his private railroad car, and he said, "This is got to be historic. This is the first time that anybody or any train has stopped at Prewitt, let alone the head of the Santa Fe Railroad." And initially, Claire Gurley asked my boss out of Washington—my boss's boss—what they would do for him, and they said they would subsidize some of the initial work and, as I remember, Gurley made this statement: "Is this contract re-negotiable?" And I guess he had re-negotiated during WWII out of most of the excess profits. And he still had a burr under his saddle as far as that was concerned. And when my boss stumbled and stuttered that all contracts were re-negotiable of this type, he said, "Then we will have nothing to do with it." Later they did form a company, many, many years later. They did a lot of work under Haystack Butte, which is just north of U.S. Route 66.

DD Where?

IR Let's see, from the Bluewater Trading Post, Haystack Butte would be ten miles--

DD I'd say five miles, ten miles…

IR West and north on the north side of the highway.

DD What other businesses were along the road in Bluewater?

LR None.

DD You were it?

IR Yeah.

DD And how about headed, as I say, west. Thoreau? What was in Thoreau that you remember? Anything?

IR Indian school?

LR Yeah, there was an Indian school there in Thoreau.

IR That's the only thing I remember. And there wasn't anything there either outside of it.

LR Refinery.

DD So we're not seeing a lot of along-the-road businesses, I'm guessing?

LR No, so that when they came to us, ah-ha! They hadn't seen anything for quite a while coming from Gallup.

DD So why did your parents sell the place and move?

LR They were getting older and they got a buyer and decided they'd had enough. And I wasn't helping that much anymore.

DD What were you doing?

LR Raising children.

DD Who did they sell it to?

LE To Katie and Frank Fernandez? Hernandez?

DD And did they run it for awhile?

LR They did. They ran it for quite a while and then, I think, Frank died. And then she had her nephew come in, and I think that's what's going on even right now.

DD Oh, you think it's open now?

LR I think, but I think all it is now is…well, the highway, for one thing, we had to move. So they put up a big Quonset. And it lost its charm for sure, at that point.

DD Why do you say you had to move?

LR Well, because the highway wanted to…

DD You mean the I-40?

LR I-40.

DD It went over Route 66?

LR It was 66, it wasn't I-40 yet.

DD Are we talking about the interstate?

LR No, it wasn't an interstate yet.

DD I'm not quite following you. What's the sequence of events?

LR There was just one road. I think, then they finally widened it to two. And then I-40 came in later—and this was in front of our trading post—and then they put I-40 way behind us.

DD What was the effect on your business?

LR Well, by then we were gone. But I think this nephew of these Hernandezes is still there.

IR Didn't your folks receive a settlement? When the highway took away some of their business?

LR Oh, yeah.

DD Is that right?

LR Some kind of a settlement. They had to get something for the land.

LR Oh, they took the land?

IR Yeah, eminent domain.

DD And did you go back?

LR I haven't been back for years. So I don't really know what the place looks like.

DD Just out of curiosity, I heard there was a place that people stayed out of Bluewater Lake? Do you know anything about that? Like an inn or hotel?

LR I have heard of something.

IR Yeah, we went up there fishing, remember? It changed around completely. They had a place where you could get bait and supplies, and it was some type of a dwelling, I guess, for tourists.

LR And that road that went to Bluewater Lake was right beside our trading post.

DD And so who was driving down that road to the lake?

LR You'd be surprised. People from Albuquerque would go fishing.

DD Did you sell bait?

LR No.

DD And they stopped at your café, probably.

LR Oh, yes. And stopped to get groceries. Stopped to get gas.

DD It sounds like it was fairly profitable.

LR It was. Those years, it was very profitable.

DD And then it began to drop down or…?

LR I don't think it dropped off till after we left. There was one thing I wanted to tell you. When I first went there, this little old lady walked in and very formally introduced herself as Mrs. Navarre. And we became quite friendly, and she was quite a character. She had come in the covered wagon with her husband—I don't know what he did—and she took me into her house one time, the little hovel with dirt floors, opened her trunk, and showed me all these gorgeous laces and beautiful gowns. And here this little old lady is

sitting there in this nothing place but with fascinating stories to tell.

DD So was she the last of the settlers?

LR I think so. Yeah, she had her little hovel right there on Highway 66. Across from the post office.

DD In Bluewater?

LR Yeah.

DD OK. Maybe it's still there.

LR No. Because the highway took all of that.

DD What did the highway actually do? You mean, it..?

LR It widened. It needed the right of way.

DD Well, thank you very much for talking to me in such length. I get a feeling for what it must have been like there to work.

LR Well, it was cold, it snowed all the time—you can't believe how much snow there was--

DD So how did the travelers make their way through the snow?

LR They cleared the roads.

DD And where was the local base for road clearing? That was Grants?

LR Yeah.

DD Grants must have been a much bigger city in the '50s.

LR Oh, never more than like 10,000.

IR 15,000.

LR 15 at the peak.

DD And then it began to fade out, fade off?

LR Back and forth. At present time, there are three prisons there, and I think that's the chief…and of course, the coal mine as a source,

ranchers—some of the old ranchers, watched them come and go, but they still raise cattle. Used to do some logging in the Zunis up there in Mount Taylor.

DD You said there was a logging industry there?

LR Yeah.

IR Yeah, it's sawmills. That's where the logger's bar came from. That was the first industry there in Grants.

DD And is there a different culture for the loggers versus the miners?

LR I think that it's pretty well interchangeable. It's all sort of hard dirty work. There isn't that much difference between being a logger and a miner.

DD And do I have permission to transcribe this interview and deposit it with the National Archives?

LR & IR Sure.

DD I'm going to ask you to sign a little form and I'm going to turn off the recording. Unless there's anything else you want to say, any other stories you remember, I'll turn this off.

LR No, I don't think so. I mean…

DD Did I forget to ask you about anything?

IR Well, I would say that during the boom, Grants became a rootin' tootin' mining town. Wasn't that much different, I don't believe, that what might have been Leadville in the '70s. I've worked a whole bunch of mining camps, and most of them were pretty rough places and that's what Grants became with 5,000 miners flocking into the place.

DD That must have brought an influx of professional women.

LR Oh yeah. With the husbands—

IR --and gamblers--

LR --that became good teachers. When the top echelon left, the good teachers left and that's when we came to Albuquerque.